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A POEM,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

ASSOCIATE ALUMNI OF WASHINGTON COLLEGE,

On the fourth day of August, 1841.

BY THE

REV. J. H. CLINCH, A. M.

Published by the Association.

Hartford.

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"Note. — The Alumni whom this publication may reach, are reminded of the resolution passed at the recent meeting of their Association, to make an effort to bring together at our next commencement all our graduates from the foundation of the College."

TIME.

I.

Time, on its axis turning, makes but one
Vast revolution — one great day and night:
The *Past* — o'er which life's gladdening heat has run,
And thought has flashed, and memory shed its light, —
This is Time's day. The *Future* — shut from sight,
Enrobed in clouds, and shades of thickest screen,
With struggling stars of hope and promise bright, —
This is Time's night. The *Present* — changing scene,
Forms the brief twilight hour, the day and night between.

II.

The past, in part, is ours, the glowing page
Of history and of truth hath made it so;
The long day's acts of joy, pain, love or rage,
Stand forth as guides to teach us how to go: —
The present, too, is ours, for bliss or woe,
A twilight mingling of their two extremes:
The future is with God; yet doth it flow
To join the past, with swift, continuous streams,
While flitting o'er its waves pass life and death, like dreams.

III.

These are my themes, perchance too dull and trite
For academic shades and groves and halls:
Subjects which drag recondite truths to light
Should wake the echoes of these sacred walls —
Subjects which lead where hidden wisdom calls,
Or scare dark error from his trembling seat,
Before whose tones his crumbling temple falls,
Burying the god beneath — themes in whose heat
Melts the base dross, and leaves truth's virgin ore complete.

IV.

But ah! to every lip it is not given
To kiss the burning coal from sacred shrine —
Few, few are those so highly prized of heaven,
Who may, with brilliant thought and glowing line,
Discourse of themes ennobling and divine.
We cannot all do all things. Each must tread
The path marked out by nature — be it mine
With humble power and lowly flight to thread
The misty maze of Time, mysterious, strange and dread.

V.

I seek to mark its course — and seeking seem
To trace a streamlet gliding through the mead
Or woodland, where alone the fitful gleam
Of day can pierce the gloom; or quickly freed
From forest twilight, with increasing speed
And flood augmented, dashing down a slope
Where rocks arise its progress to impede,
But rise in vain — like terrors against hope,
Or foes against despair, where spears a path must ope.

VI.

On, on it flies, o'er every barrier springing
With mighty impulse and with headlong leaps,
To where, the ceaseless hymn of nature singing,
Ocean's eternity of waters keeps
Perpetual music, and the voice of deeps
Calleth to deep. So the stream sped away,
Methought, to join the tides, where silence sleeps,
Far down in their abysses, where a ray
Entrance hath never found from the serene of day.

VII.

And as the stream swept on, the dewy flowers
Which decked its marge, their silky petals threw
Upon its eddying waters, and the showers
Of pattering rain, when gusts of autumn blew,
Bade the tall trees their leaves by thousands strew
Upon its heaving bosom, and the bank,
Where with sharp turn the impetuous torrent flew
In foaming eddies onward, piecemeal sank,
Borne by the flood to fill the caves of ocean dank.

VIII.

And ever and anon some goodly tree
By woodman's axe subdued, or slow decay,
Swept by to ocean's broad eternity,
Rolling and plunging on its foamy way,
And spurning from its knotted limbs the spray,
E'en like a drowning giant; — now a rock
Grasping in vain his desperate course to stay —
And now some root which rends before the shock,
And now smoothe bending reeds which all his efforts mock.

IX.

In such swift brook I see the flight of time;
Of time, which, like a tributary tide,
Empties its waters into that sublime
And mighty torrent which shall ever hide
Its source in clouds and darkness, and the wide
Extension of whose stream forbids all sense
A limit to define on either side; —
A shoreless ocean, wrapped in vapours dense,
Forever to roll on, mysterious, dim, immense.

X.

Eternity! ennobling, humbling thought!
Primeless and endless — adding day by day
Accumulations to the past, but not
Withdrawing from the future ought away —
Old, but forever new — with no delay
To its incessant course, yet still it sleeps —
Sleeps, e'en though countless ages may decay,
Without a tide or wave; yet in its deeps
Time's ceaseless eddy runs, and still its current keeps.

XI.

We "grasp to take the vast idea in" —
To compass the unlimited, in vain.
Thought sinks exhausted; and we scarce begin
To gird our powers the combat to sustain,
To grapple with infinity, and gain
The mastery of unimagined things,
Ere clouds and darkness gather on the brain —
Obscurity unfolds its ebon wings,
And weakness o'er the mind its leaden shackles flings.

XII.

Why is it so? Why must the soul in vain
Attempt its own existence to survey?
The mortal scans the finite; why again
May not the immortal send its thoughts away
To deep infinity? E'en so it may,
But not until the imprisoned mind is free —
Not till "the muddy vesture of decay"
Fall from around it, and the spirit flee
Uncaged, unchained, from earth, its home of light to see.

XIII.

All that the eye may rest upon below —
All that the sense perceive, is hedged around
And limited on all sides; and we know
That e'en the sands are numbered, and a bound
Is fixed to those bright hosts whose voiceless sound
Speaks to all lands, strewing the azure floor
With golden dust; and number may be found
E'en for the drops of ocean — but no lore
May reckon up thy waves, — O sea without a shore!

XIV.

Thou hast no depths, for thou art fathomless —
No tides for thou art changeless — still at rest,
Save the low billows' heavings which compress
Worlds' brief durations in their foamy breast;
Each airy *bubble* on whose swelling crest
Springs forth a *life* — and dances joyous by
For one short moment, in rich colors drest,
Then bursts unmarked — its hues of beauty fly,
Whilst others leaping forth, its short-lived place supply.

XV.

Eternity! — God's life! — Life's boundless space! —
Who in such ocean thoughts shall dare embark,
Fearless of shipwreck? Who shall hope to trace
Such themes to their original, and mark
Their progress or their end? The glow-worm spark
Of human wisdom — human thought? Alas!
Lights which but make obscurity more dark, —
Powers weighty but in weakness! "Through a glass
Darkly" our clearest views — our keenest sight must pass.

XVI.

Time's stream flows into this eternity —
Eternity its secret source supplies;
And as its troubled billows swiftly flee,
Passing earth's shifting scenes and changeful skies,
It bears to that far ocean as its prize,
The dewy flowers of youth — the scarer leaves
Of manhood, and, at times, her agonies
A dying nation o'er its current heaves,
And, like the shattered tree, her wreck time's flood receives.

XVII.

The monument or pyramid, which seemed
"*Ære perennius*" when it first arose —
The castle towers, where war's red beacon beamed,
Frowning defiance on ten thousand foes,
Slowly have crumbled to the ceaseless blows
Of age's noiseless hand, and one by one
Have sunk beneath the tide that ever flows,
To bear them to oblivion's chamber's dun,
E'en like the torrents bank, where eddying waters run.

XVIII.

On hastes time's current with perpetual sweep,
Spurning all interruption : — strength may fling
His rocky barriers to its torrent deep —
Pleasure's bright flowers and rank weeds clustering,
May seek to check its progress, fame may bring
Her garlands to its eddies, and essay
To plant them in the waters till they spring
Into far spreading palms, and wealth may lay
Broad dams of golden sand its onward course to stay ; —

XIX.

All, all in vain : — in foamy letters traced
" *Labitur et labetur* " read its tale ;
And man, borne downward by its ceaseless haste,
May e'en outrun the current, for the gale
Aids the descending voyage : — but to sail
Upward against the tide to none is given.
The strongest anchor in that stream is frail,
And none may pause — all, all are onward driven,
Happy whose compass points untremblingly to Heaven.

XX.

Look at the Past — there hear time's rapid flight
Speak in a voice most eloquent and stern,
There mark its current sweep like flashing light
Of meteors seen and lost : — there man may learn
How brief his history, told in " words that burn " —
The centuried patriarch " *lived, produced*, and *died*,"
How brief the tale ! The cradle and the urn
In close propinquity, and human pride
Hath this to mark its course, and little else beside.

XXI.

Could we but call *thee*, spirit of past time,
To lead us through the moonlit avenues
And sombre glens, where shadows flit sublime;
And through the caves obscure where thou dost muse
In solitude unseen, and dost refuse
All mortal step to cross thy magic line,
All mortal sight to pry: though in thy hues
Conjecture clad, at times, assumes thy sign,
And self-deluded man believes *her* features *thine*;

XXII.

I would invoke thee to direct my foot
Where the historic muse hath never strayed;
Where old tradition pauses, and whence mute
She turns to paths more easily surveyed:
And ask thy guidance to that midnight shade
Not e'en by inspiration's hallowed ray
Disturbed or pierced; — where thou secure hast laid
The deep foundations of thy shrine away,
And reared the mighty walls and bulwarks of thy sway.

XXIII.

I would ascend through ages, and illume
Thy rayless dwellings, and would send my gaze
Through all the range of shadows and of gloom,
From sunset dimness of past yesterdays,
To time's black morning — from the light which plays
Round certainty, to doubt's unbroken tomb,
Enclosing forms unknown. But who may raise
The mystic veil which hangs around their doom,
Or from sepulchral night the long lost dead exhume?

XXIV.

Within that gloomy home of unknown things —
That grave of long departed memories,
O'er which the past spreads out her jealous wing,
Spurning with frowns the suppliant from her knees
Who asks one transient, fleeting glance to seize —
How many deeds of heroes rest unsung —
What days of action and what hours of ease —
What crimes, o'er which Cimmerian darkness hung —
What passions and what woes, the trembling heart have wrung!

XXV.

In all the "pomp and circumstance" of war
How many a chief his bright array has led
To fields which groaned beneath the brazen car,
The tramp of thousands and the charger's tread;
And eve hath seen the hungry vultures fed
E'en to satiety, and ravens hoarse
Croak o'er the mangled remnants of the dead
Whom morn beheld in confidence of force
Spring eager to the fight, as steed that seeks the course.

XXVI.

And tyrants, too, have vexed the earth awhile
Upon a trembling and unstable throne;
And self-styled patriots have won the smile
Of the unthinking many, and have grown
Themselves to be the despots — and the moan
Of suffering thousands who the power conferred,
Waked by that power, arose with wailing tone,
Till fury crushed the monster with a word, —
And lo! another's voice subjects the cringing herd.

XXVII.

And still, perchance, there have been times of peace,
When power galled not, and battle's voice was mute,
And labor gave the sturdy swains release:
When dark-browed virgins to the melting flute
Beat time in festive measures, as the foot
Swept o'er the elastic turf; and joyous bands
Bore home with songs the rich autumnal fruit
Plucked by free men from green, luxuriant lands,
Nor came a tyrant there to wrest it from their hands.

XXVIII.

And yet, albeit, those hours of plenty drew
Sloth in their train and luxury, and a style
Of inverse manners, and a hideous crew
Of crimes which breathe contagion, and defile
The moral landscape: — as the mighty Nile,
So fables tell, along its oozy bed
Gives birth to reptile monsters, rank and vile,
Nursed in its slime and by its softness fed,
Which in more troubled streams their forms had never spread.

XXIX.

But vain the task within these depths to pry;
Ay! doubly vain — wrapt in their murky shroud
They dwell severe and deign us no reply;
Yet what though they *should* answer, and uncloud
The forms which they conceal? — we should but crowd
A few more griefs in history's ample scroll —
A few more follies of the great and proud —
A few more passions spurning all control —
A few more deadly crimes to shock the saddened soul.

XXX.

And this is all, for man remains the same
In every age if passion be his guide, —
If virtue rise not to direct his aim, —
Nor pure religion o'er his paths preside :
Revenge, deceit, ambition, envy, pride,
Light in his breast by turns their baleful flame,
Indulgence reigns, and mammon deified
Finds every where a temple to his name,
And history's latest words remotest deeds may claim.

XXXI.

Save where the word of truth throws light around,
The morning of the past in darkness lies,
And e'en upon its noon thick clouds are found,
Rendering its scenes obscure : — but brighter skies
Receive the westering sun, and to our eyes
Day's later hours bring objects full and clear;
Yet though no more in mists and shades they rise,
They gleam through passion's changeful atmosphere,
And robed in foreign hues too oft their forms appear.

XXXII.

Its richest scenes are those which lie within
The range of memory's eye : — a rosy glow
Bathes them in softened radiance, and they win
New beauties from that light, which deftly throw
A dreamy mist o'er rugged paths of woe —
Bid Lethe's waves conceal the rocks of pain, —
Teach joy's bright flowers alone their hues to show,
And hide their thorns; while o'er that fairy plain
No night nor winter falls — its glories still remain.

XXXIII.

'Tis bright, but 'tis not real. Truth, alas!
Dispels the charm, and all its warmth destroys;
We see it through imagination's glass,
And her's are half its beauties and its joys:
Yet sweet to turn from life's discordant noise, —
From all its cold reality and care,
Back on those scenes which sorrow ne'er alloys,
Or if there *be* some lingering sorrows there,
Smoothed are their rufiled brows, and mild the garb they wear.

XXXIV.

Not that the present has no joys to show,
For life is full of joys for those of mind
Balanced and tempered happily: they know
How the sweet drop, though well concealed, to find
Hidden by sorrow's hard and bitter rind.
"Life is a mingled yarn" — the good is theirs
Who *seek* the good, and leave the ill behind;
The evil, with its troubles and its cares,
Darkens the gloomy heart which *seeks* the load it bears.

XXXV.

Yes, life *has* joys: go seek it in the bower
Of wedded love and virtue — in the bliss
Of friendship full of confidence — the power
Of passion melted into tenderness;
Seek it in that sweet word, which those who miss,
Miss life's best boon, and joy's most fruitful spring, —
Home — virtue's home — and in the holy kiss
Of deep, domestic love; when children fling
Young arms round parents' necks, and there in fondness cling.

XXXVI.

Go seek it in the consciousness which grows
From duties well discharged and virtuous deeds,—
Deeds which retain an odor, like the rose,
E'en after death, and scatter wide the seeds
Of happiness, where nought but bitter weeds
Or desolation reigned: seek it where flows
Religion's balm upon the heart that bleeds,
And wisdom's light upon the mind that knows
No *truth* in life except its darkness and its woes.

XXXVII.

Go seek it in hope's gay and rosy light,
False though it be at times, and fleeting too,
And where young fancy sits, amid the bright
Creations which her own rich pencil drew,
A brilliant, but albeit, a fickle crew:—
And seek it where the young, the good, the wise,
In blameless pleasures, such as never threw
A cloud on conscience, seize the hour that flies,
And tinge its passing wings with hues of Paradise.

XXXVIII.

The present, only, we can truly know;
There, on the objects round us, we can lay
Our very hand;—with cautious step and slow
Surround them, and examine day by day
Their forms and features ere they pass away:
We see the past with *others'* eyes — our *own*
Look on the present, and we can survey
The future's deep obscurity alone
Through vague conjecture's glass, most indistinctly shown.

XXXIX.

E'en as the pilot on the darkling sea
Strives o'er the waves the distant land to view,
We seek to catch the objects, but they flee
Or change before we mark their proper hue;
E'en when we seem to hold the very clue
To lead us through its labyrinths, we fail
To reach the point of certainty — a new
And chartless ocean tempts our dubious sail,
E'en when we deemed the land our gladdened eyes would hail.

XL.

Save that at times night lifts her ebon wing,
And meteor flashes o'er the waters gleam,
Throwing a momentary light on things
Which float afar upon the Stygian stream;
And the eye catches, as in troubled dream,
Dim, flitting forms and visions half revealed,
And shadowy phantoms, on whose features seem
Faintly impressed, events in darkness sealed,
But which no certain clue to pierce the shades can yield.

XLI.

We take conjecture for our doubtful guide,
And try with her to win our darkling way,
But blinded, baffled, checked on every side,
Back on our steps we turn, and seek the day: —
Again, and yet again our thoughts essay
To pierce the depths of that impending shroud,
But all in vain — save one unfading ray
Which revelation hath to man allowed,
All else is doubly dark, unbroken gloom and cloud.

XLII.

The present we *may* read, but all beyond
Is indistinct and dark, and it is not
For us to dare unloose the mystic bond
Which girds futurity, and read the lot
Assigned to those who shall succeed us. What
Is ours but meekly to await the day
Which soon shall roll from each benighted spot
The midnight which enshrouds it, and obey
That over-ruling power who guides our doubtful way?

XLIII.

Alas! to learn the secrets which repose
In distant darkness can no bliss bestow:
Trials may there await us, and deep woes
And griefs which consolation cannot know;
And e'en though coming *happiness* may throw
Its light upon our onward journey, why
Madly bedim the brightness of its glow
By long anticipation, and deny
That joy's best gifts are those which greet the unlonging eye?

XLIV.

'Tis well for man that in the deep abyss
The future lies concealed — impending care
Is better unforeknown, and coming bliss
More thrilling for its suddenness: beware
Rash, curious mortal, how thy glances dare
To scan the hidden leaves of earthly fate;
Bear with firm front what thou art called to bear —
Enjoy with gratitude thy happier state,
And all that lies beyond in tranquil trust await.

XLV.

Then turn we from *Conjecture's* misty lines,
And see what *Truth* has painted. Through the shade
Which shrouds that scene, one ray of glory shines
Whose light no storm can dim, no cloud invade, —
That beam, God's promise to his creatures made,
Whereby the Church, amid surrounding gloom,
And darkness palpable, beholds displayed
Within her walls the light of Goshen bloom,
While hangs on all without the blackness of the tomb.

XLVI.

Led by that light, look down the vale of years,
And see, amid the dimness, looming high,
That Church of the Redeemer, sown in tears,
Finding its home 'neath every foreign sky —
See how before her widening glories fly
The shadows from the nations! Still she spreads,
And still *must* spread, till time itself shall die;
While truth o'er earth her blessed influence sheds,
Unfold your valves ye doors, ye gates erect your heads!

XLVII.

The Church's future path is bright and clear,
A star of glory lights it from above;
There is is no dimness in the future here,
However dark in other paths it prove —
Howe'er we grope uncertainly, and move
As the blind move, beyond her influence,
Following her paths of peace, her calls of love,
The mind springs boldly forward through the immense
Of yet unnumbered years with clear, unclouded sense.

XLVIII.

And all of earth that we may truly know,
Or earthly things concealed in future night,
We see alone because they catch the glow
Which streams around from her celestial light:
And on the retina of human sight
Clearly or dimly does their image rise
E'en as it comes *within* that circle bright,
Or *from* its glowing centre widely flies,
Beyond conjecture's ken, or fancy's eagle eyes.

XLIX.

May we not read, then, for this classic seat,
Linked to the Church, and resting in her shade,
A glorious destiny upon the sheet
Of future time inscribed? The Church hath bade
Her light repose upon your rising head —
She sanctifies your lore — she lifts on high
Her blazing banners, in your sight displayed
To guide your march to future victory,
A sure and certain light to fix the wandering eye.

L.

While thus upon the Church's steps you tread,
E'en as she follows CHRIST, you cannot err —
Advancing ever to your glorious Head,
His bliss and fulness you shall share with *her;*
You need no other deep interpreter
Of the dark future — clearly doth it say,
Before her path each lofty barrier
Of ignorance and pride shall melt away,
And those who share her toils her triumphs shall repay.

LI.

Success waits ever near the willing hand : —
The past behind you holds the beacon light
Of long experience, and before you stand
The hopes of future years clear, steady, bright —
The present is your own — O ! use aright
Its fleeting moments ! Think how much depends
E'en on to-day, and how the blasting blight
Of failure ever on delay attends,
And how with best resolves temptation's whisper blends.

LII.

" Pendet ab hoc momento eternitas " —
So speaks time's passing record — and the day
With all its follies and its sins must pass
To join the long, redeemless, dread array
Of our departed yesterdays ; away
With idlesse, then, — for wisdom never sheds,
Nor fortune, nor success, their joyous ray
On faint and nerveless hands and thoughtless heads ;
They light that path alone which *active* virtue treads.

LIII.

And if the present hours are garnered well
With patient study and with faithful care,
Know ye that when the added units swell
To years and centuries, they still shall bear
Your well remembered names? That ye shall share
(When what is now the present shall be past,)
The honors paid to virtue rich and rare,
And wisdom well bestowed? Such praise shall last
When o'er the hero's name oblivion's dust is cast.

LIV.

Yes! if well used these hours shall pass away,
Your future shall be glorious — life shall end
Like the fair sunset of a summer's day,
Without a cloud its radiance to offend;
And when that soft, yet solemn hour, shall send
The soul from earth to join the mighty dead,
Angels from Heaven with love and joy shall bend
To bear on high, where reigns the Church's Head,
The souls which labored well that Church on earth to spread.

LV.

My humble rhyme is said — thanks for the kind
And courteous audience of a simple lay:
Common my themes — too common, for the mind
Too oft forgets the import they convey;
If, then, my strain in any breast to-day
Has waked one high resolve — one holy thought —
One noble purpose ne'er to pass away —
Fulfilled the highest end my verse has sought,
Nor you, nor I, shall deem this hour employed for nought.

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